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AUTHOR Baker, Tamara L.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a description of Safe Harbor, a diversity and tolerance program that focuses on helping faculty and staff become allies to students who need extra support, such as domestic students of color, international students, sexual minorities, and disabled students. The program begins with a brief videotape of three students (representing international students, sexual minorities, and students of color) discussing what they need from faculty and staff. Participants are then introduced to various advocacy issues, such as confidentiality concerns and walking the fine line between supporting and pushing students to take action. With increased empathy and diversity awareness as primary goals, the next sections of the program combine exercises, readings, discussion, and information to address these issues. The final part of the program requires participants to discuss several questions that highlight diversity issues at their particular institution. After discussing issues, each small group presents their best solution for addressing a concern at the institution. To close the program, participants delineate some personal commitment to improve campus climate with respect to diversity and are awarded their Safe Harbor certificates. (Contains 15 references.) (GCP)

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Safe Harbor: Helping Faculty and Staff Become Allies to Students Who Need Support

Tamara L. Baker, Ph.D.

Hood College

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Abstract

Safe Harbor is a program that seeks to help faculty and staff become allies to college students who need extra support, such as international students, domestic students of color, sexual minorities, and disabled students. It is a diversity and tolerance training program that also builds mentoring skills. The benefits of Safe Harbor include awareness of diversity issues, improved campus relationships, and student retention.

Safe Harbor: Helping Faculty and Staff Become Allies to Students Who Need Support

Diversity training is one of the most effective tools for effecting attitudinal and behavioral change (Springer, 1995; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1997c). Some positive outcomes are increased corporate productivity and profitability (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1997a), as well as enhanced organizational and personal effectiveness (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1997b). However, diversity training is not just about corporations and profit; it is about the people affected. "A commitment to diversity is a commitment to all employees...," states R. Roosevelt Thomas in his book, Beyond Race and Gender (1991).

While diversity and tolerance issues are often a concern of colleges and universities (Ballobin, 1993), retention is almost always a top priority (Tinto, 1993; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994). Mentoring by faculty and staff increases retention significantly (Nelson, 1993; Clark and others, 1995). Safe Harbor is a program that addresses both diversity and retention needs, builds a variety of participant skills (diversity awareness, mentoring skills, listening and empathy skills), and results in multiple benefit—both for participants and student beneficiaries.

What makes Safe Harbor unique as a diversity and tolerance program is the focus on helping faculty and staff become allies to students who need extra support, such as domestic students of color, international students, sexual minorities, and disabled students. Those who complete the training receive a certificate to display in their office. Students are informed what the certificate means—that the faculty or staff member cares enough to learn how to support them, that they sincerely want to be a mentor, and that they have a variety of resource materials to assist them.

Ponteretto (1998) describes an effective diversity training program as containing self-inquiry, observation of the environment, personal sharing, and a solution-finding orientation. He calls for exploration of racial, gender, and sexual orientation attitudes (Ponteretto, 1998). Safe Harbor contains all of these crucial features, but also includes exploration of attitudes toward the disabled.

The program begins with a brief videotape of three students (representing international students, sexual minorities, and students of color) discussing what they need from faculty and staff. This is often listed as one of the most helpful components of the program. Participants are then introduced to various advocacy issues, such as confidentiality concerns and walking the fine line between supporting and pushing students to take action.

Effective training programs that foster attitudinal change contain exercises that result in an increased ability to empathize with the perspectives of individuals or groups who are marginalized in our society (Kiselica, 1998). With increased empathy and diversity awareness as primary goals, the next sections of the program combine exercises, readings, discussion, and information to address issues pertaining to domestic students of color, international students, sexual minorities, and students with disabilities. [Please see note at end of article for more information]. Resources and referral options are provided at the end of each section.

To bridge the gap between changing attitudes and increasing skills as called for by Evans and Anderson (1992), each participant receives a "situation card" (developed by Cullen & Thompson, 1991). Each card contains a "real-life" problem in the areas of racism, heterosexism, ableism, sexism, and Jewish oppression. Participants discuss

various options for addressing the problem and learn from the different perspectives shared by others.

Diversity trainers must be aware of the vision, values, and mission of the institution (Chahin, 1993) and make a direct connection to the campus culture. Consequently, the next part of the program requires participants to discuss several questions that highlight diversity issues at the particular institution. After discussing issues, each small group presents their "best" solution for addressing a concern at the institution. These solutions may be shared with administrators. To close the program, participants delineate some personal commitment to improve the campus climate with respect to diversity and are awarded their Safe Harbor certificates.

The support of senior administrators is critical to the success of any diversity training program (Evans & Anderson, 1992; Chahin, 1993; Ponteretto, 1998; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1997b). Vice presidents, Human Resources staff, and others may refer employees to the Safe Harbor program. The referring administrator receives a letter of commendation for each participant who completes the training, and a copy of the letter goes in the employee's personnel file for consideration during performance review.

Note: Readers are welcome to use this program as a starting point to champion diversity on their campus. While Safe Harbor is copyrighted, the program with all supporting exercises, discussion questions, and readings can be ordered by writing to the author at the following address: Tamara L. Baker, Ph.D., Director of Counseling, Hood College, 401 Rosemont Avenue, Frederick, MD 21701-8575; tbaker@hood.edu.

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